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Adoption of the report of the Committee on its fifty-eighth session

Draft report

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Addendum

Programme questions: programme performance of the United Nations for the biennium 2016–2017

(*Item 3 (a)*)

Report of the Secretary-General on the programme performance of the United Nations for the biennium 2016–2017

1. At its 11th meeting, on 13 June 2018, the Committee considered the report of the Secretary-General on the programme performance of the United Nations for the biennium 2016–2017 (A/73/77).

2. The representative of the Secretary-General introduced the report and, together with other representatives, responded to questions raised during its consideration by the Committee.

Discussion

3. Delegations commended the Secretariat on its efforts in compiling the report, which provided an analysis of the implementation of 33,954 mandated and additional outputs under 36 sections of the programme budget. Appreciation was expressed for the comprehensiveness and usefulness of the report, which was submitted in accordance with regulation 6.1 of the Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation, providing a bird's-eye view of the progress made towards achieving the priorities of Member States. It was emphasized that the information contained therein was both results-based and output-oriented and included challenges faced by the Secretariat. The report was also recognized as a useful tool for ensuring accountability.

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4. Concerns were raised as to the overall rate of implementation of mandated outputs of 93 per cent in the biennium 2016–2017, which reflected a reduction of 1 per cent compared with the previous biennium. A delegation sought clarification on the impact of that reduction on all bodies. Questions were raised as to the low implementation rates of outputs by specific departments and offices, in particular the Office of Central Support Services, where, it was noted, a number of mandated outputs had been terminated. A delegation expressed concern over the data presented on the termination of activities, according to which 57 per cent of cases were linked to legislative mandates, 40 per cent to programmatic reasons, only 3 per cent to a lack of extrabudgetary funding and less than 1 per cent to vacancies in the Secretariat, and stated that one of the Organization's main priorities in the area of programme planning related to fine-tuning the work of legislative bodies of the Secretariat. A delegation noted in particular that there were sections of the budget where the implementation rate was less than 90 per cent, including section 29D, Office of Central Support Services, where it was 62 per cent. A delegation found the explanation of work having been shifted to another section of the budget to be unacceptable.

5. A delegation asked how the Secretariat accorded priority to its activities relating to implementing more than 30,000 outputs, in particular those initiated at its own discretion. Another delegation sought further information on the impact of the implementation of specific outputs such as brochures and publications and on the types of output implemented as part of technical cooperation, together with information on how the Secretariat measured such impact.

6. Regarding paragraph 12, concerning political affairs, a delegation, noting the activities covered under the four programmes, namely political affairs, peacekeeping operations, disarmament and the peaceful uses of outer space, asked why information on the activities of special political missions had been omitted after having been included in previous reports.

7. In reference to paragraph 98 of the report, relating to the final statement on the delivery of outputs and resource utilization, several delegations raised concerns regarding funding through extrabudgetary resources, noting that outputs in all categories were delivered using a total of 152,061 work-months, of which 62 per cent were financed from the regular budget and 38 per cent from extrabudgetary resources, as in the previous biennium, which was not a welcome trend. It was emphasized that an increasing reliance on extrabudgetary resources posed a risk to multilateralism and that it came with a price, in that it hindered an impartial assessment of the work of the Organization. A delegation noted that the Office of Counter-Terrorism, which had been established pursuant to a General Assembly resolution, had yet to achieve a meaningful level of funding under the regular budget as the number of its posts funded by extrabudgetary resources exceeded those funded by the regular budget. That delegation further questioned how the work of any department could be assessed when much of it was performed using extrabudgetary resources. A concern was also raised as to the tendency towards a high dependence on consultants, which accounted for 28 per cent of the work-months funded from extrabudgetary resources, with clarification sought on the reasons therefor. A delegation noted that the donors that provided extrabudgetary resources were the same as those that continued to propose a reduction in assessed contributions.

8. Regarding the information on the status of implementation of General Assembly resolutions on administrative and budgetary matters contained in the annex to the report, questions were raised as to who determined that status, in particular whether the determination was self-certified by the lead department or whether an independent body pronounced itself thereon.

9. A delegation noted with appreciation the level of outputs implemented under section 2, Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, and expressed concern over the challenges faced by the Department owing to the pressure upon it as a result of the overlap in the sessions of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions and the Fifth Committee. That delegation, voicing further concern about the increased workload that the Department would face owing to the annualization of the budget cycle, emphasized the need for support to be extended to the Department by ensuring that sufficient resources were made available for it to keep the budgetary process flowing smoothly and on time.

10. A delegation commended the Secretariat on its efforts to reduce the total number of pages printed over the past few years and the resulting efficiency gains. It was noted that the number of pages printed in New York, Geneva, Nairobi and Vienna had declined significantly, from 726 million in 2008 to 188 million in 2017, and, in that regard, the Secretariat was encouraged to make further reductions so as to shrink its environmental footprint.

11. Referring to the information contained in paragraph 21 of the report that the Office of Legal Affairs had defended the privileges and immunities of the United Nations, its assets and its staff worldwide and resolved claims against the Organization in the amount of $183.4 million for $11.3 million, a delegation sought clarification as to how that significant reduction had been achieved and wished to know what types of claim had been made and the measures that were planned to mitigate future such claims.

12. With regard to the relatively higher number of outputs added at the initiative of the Secretariat in response to the needs of the region under section 22, Economic and social development in Western Asia, compared with those added through legislation, a view was expressed that such additions could be attributed to poor planning.

13. Regarding section 24, Human rights, a delegation observed that the issue of geographical representation in the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights remained acute, pointing out that staff members at the D-2 and D-1 levels were predominantly from Western countries. A delegation indicated that the programme of work under the section had been conducted fully in line with the programme plan adopted by the Committee and expressed the hope that in the future there would be a genuine and meaningful discussion of the human rights programme.

14. Regarding section 25, International protection, durable solutions and assistance to refugees, covering the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), some delegations objected to the reference in the report to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons, stressing that there was no consensus on the matter. Serious concern was raised over the carrying out of non-consensual activities and the use of non-consensual terms in the reports submitted to the Committee, given that there were more commonly agreed terms to describe people in vulnerable situations. A number of other delegations expressed support for the use of such terminology, stating that the terms were in common usage and did not require intergovernmental approval. Regarding the use of those terms in the report in relation to a learning programme developed in 2017, on the protection of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons, a delegation was of the view that that usage was entirely appropriate as it was a statement of fact on a programme conducted by UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration. Another delegation recalled that the Committee had discussed the same issue at length two years previously, observing that, following that discussion, in line with such resolutions of the Human Rights Council as resolutions 17/19, 27/32 and 32/2, it was evident that the activities of UNHCR in that regard were fully in line with its mandate.

15. While noting that, in general, UNHCR continued to perform its functions successfully and effectively, especially in the area of assisting States and enhancing their role in addressing refugee problems, a delegation was of the view that UNHCR and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights had undertaken activities that were not aligned with the mandates provided to them, including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and noted that some of the strategic priorities included a focus on corruption, the environment and digital technology, while overlooking technological cooperation, combating racism and xenophobia and other human rights issues.

16. Appreciation was also expressed for efforts under section 27, Humanitarian assistance, in terms of providing administrative support and other resources for ReliefWeb and in advancing the principles guiding the provision of humanitarian assistance, as well as the facilities for the implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030. A delegation noted that the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs continued to effectively carry out functions in dealing with refugee-related issues. A delegation, in referring to General Assembly resolution 72/133 and Economic and Social Council resolution 2017/14 on the strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations, raised concerns about the inclusion of information in the report on the implementation of the Agenda for Humanity (paras. 49 and 822), emphasizing that Member States had not provided the Office with a mandate to implement the Agenda, nor to report on any follow-up action in that regard.

17. A delegation highlighted the completion of an International Public Sector Accounting Standards-compliant financial report and audited financial statements for the United Nations for 2015 (para. 55) and for the United Nations peacekeeping operations for 2015/16 using Umoja as one of the fundamental achievements made during the biennium and encouraged the Secretariat to move forward in that regard so as to achieve a more transparent way of managing its work. With regard to information contained in the report that, under section 29B, Office of Programme Planning, Budget and Accounts, the Office had been responsible for more than 60 per cent of all Umoja processes, a delegation asked where the responsibility for the remaining 40 per cent rested.

Conclusions and recommendations

18. **The Committee recommended that the General Assembly take note of the report of the Secretary-General on the programme performance of the United Nations for the biennium 2016–2017** (A/73/77).

19. **The Committee stressed the importance of the Secretariat using programme performance reporting as a management tool in the programme planning process, in line with the principles of results-based management, including by regularly reviewing programme performance.**

20. **The Committee expressed its appreciation for the information provided in the programme performance report, in line with the relevant General Assembly resolutions, and underlined the importance of such information continuing to be provided in the future.**

21. **The Committee recommended that the General Assembly urge the Secretary-General to ensure the timely presentation of reports, in line with the relevant regulations and rules.**